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Cylchlythyr

Circular

## Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies 2011/12 to 2013/14: Initial Guidance

**Date:** 1 December 2010  
**Reference:** W10/41HE  
**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales  
**Response by:** 1 February 2011; 29 July 2011  
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This circular invites Higher Education Institutions to submit strategies for learning and teaching and for widening access. Strategies should cover the three years 2011/12 to 2013/14. The strategies should be submitted by **29 July 2011**. It also seeks the involvement of higher education providers and other parties with an interest in equality and diversity issues in the further development of strategy guidance.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2225 or email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).

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Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
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## Introduction

1. This circular invites Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales to submit new strategies for Learning and Teaching and Widening Access. Strategies should cover the three years 2011/12 to 2013/14.
2. This circular provides initial guidance to support the development of both Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies.
3. We will publish supplementary guidance and funding allocations in **April 2011**, subject to the confirmation of funding by the Welsh Assembly Government.
4. The strategies should be submitted by **29 July 2011**. Institutions may choose to submit the strategies either combined or separately.
5. This circular also seeks the involvement of Higher Education providers and other parties with an interest in equality and diversity issues in the further development of strategy guidance. Matters for consideration should be submitted by **1 February 2011**.

## Background and context

6. *For our Future: The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales* was published in November 2009<sup>1</sup>. It built on and replaced *Reaching Higher*, and provided a response to the *Jones Review of Higher Education*. It is based on the two priorities of social justice and supporting a buoyant economy, and identifies specific target outcomes which benefit one or both of these priorities.
7. *For Our Future* also included the expectation that the Welsh Assembly Government, working with stakeholders and HEFCW, would develop a regional dimension to planning and delivery of higher education. It noted the need for HEFCW to:  
*'explore, develop and co-ordinate, in concert with the HE community, the development of a regional planning and delivery structure in Wales which can identify and tackle need while demonstrating the best use of resources'*<sup>2</sup>
8. In developing learning and teaching and widening access strategies institutions will want to take account of their regional strategies, including their role in, and contribution to, these strategies. This might include joint curriculum working, rationalisation of provision, reducing unnecessary duplication and progression arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/091125hedocen.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For further information on regional strategies see circulars W10/16HE and W10/28HE at [www.hefcw.gov.uk/publications/circulars](http://www.hefcw.gov.uk/publications/circulars)

9. The context to this call for new strategies is also a period of great challenge for the Higher Education (HE) sector in Wales. Challenges include:
  - the economic climate;
  - the cap on student numbers;
  - increased number of applications to higher education;
  - change in population demographic;
  - the regionalisation agenda; and
  - implications for Wales of the Westminster Government's response to the Browne review of HE funding and finance<sup>3</sup>;
  - implications of the Equality Act 2010 and associated duties.
10. Given the current economic climate and the expectations placed on the sector by the Welsh Assembly Government, it is clear that we are not operating in a 'business as usual' context. We therefore expect institutions to set out in their Learning and Teaching and Widening Access strategies robust planning and delivery mechanisms to enable them to meet the challenges of the current environment.
11. Our Corporate Strategy 2010-11 to 2012-13 was developed in response to *For Our Future*<sup>4</sup>. It identifies five key themes which contribute to the delivery of the two *For Our Future* priorities of social justice and supporting a buoyant economy.
12. Student experience is one of the five key themes within our Corporate Strategy. Through Learning and Teaching Strategy funding we provide institutions with specific support to facilitate them in ensuring that the student learning experience is of high quality, as identified within Circular W10/02HE<sup>5</sup>. Institutions are required to submit Learning and Teaching strategies in order to access this funding.
13. Widening Access is another Corporate Strategy theme and *HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan to Widening Access to Higher Education* sits beneath our Corporate Strategy and sets out our widening access-related strategic aims, objectives and initial actions<sup>6</sup>.

## The Purpose of Strategies

14. We invite the submission of these strategies in order to:
  - understand clearly the basis on which we are supporting learning and teaching and widening access strategic planning and delivery;

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<sup>3</sup> <http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/hereview/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate\\_documents/corporate\\_strategy.aspx](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/corporate_documents/corporate_strategy.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2010/W10%2002HE%20Mechanisms%20for%20Supporting%20the%20Enhancement%20of%20Learning%20Opportunities.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2002HE%20Mechanisms%20for%20Supporting%20the%20Enhancement%20of%20Learning%20Opportunities.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *HEFCW's Strategic Approach and Plan for Widening Access to Higher Education* has been published for consultation: see circular W10/36HE.

- provide accountability for public funding through the setting of, and reporting on, targets. Funding may be withheld or withdrawn if reporting is unsatisfactory;
- enable institutions to demonstrate to us their strategic intentions in priority areas;
- provide the basis for strategic dialogue between HEFCW and the sector, by setting out institutions' key priorities, responses to Assembly Government policies and priorities;
- enable HEFCW to provide informed responses on institutions' progress and performance to the Assembly Government and other key stakeholders.

15. We recognise that strategies are equally important to institutions to:
- communicate aspirations, identify clearly the institutional agenda for actions and direction of travel, and facilitate transparency in articulating mechanisms for measuring progress and success;
  - identify, and ensure staff commitment to, the agreed strategic approach to drive cultural change and deliver improvement in these policy areas;
  - underpin the high-level aims and objectives for these policy areas identified in institutional strategic plans;
  - demonstrate how they will contribute to the delivery of For Our Future and other Welsh Assembly Government expectations;
  - showcase their commitment and effective practice in relation to learning and teaching and widening access.

### **Initial Strategy Guidance**

16. We are publishing strategy guidance for Learning and Teaching and for Widening Access in one circular with shared timelines. Institutions may choose to submit the strategies either combined or separately. If combined strategies are submitted they should set clearly identifiable priorities and targets for the two policy areas, and separately account for the use of Learning and Teaching and Widening Access allocations.
17. This move to joint strategy guidance recognises that both strategies:
- are new and institutions will use them in responding to the *For our Future* priorities, outlined above;
  - are co-dependent, with each having implications for, and informing, the development of the other;
  - will reflect HEIs' strategic plans and approaches to issues such as retention and student success, enhancing learning and teaching through use of technology, flexible learning, accessibility, equality and diversity, Welsh medium provision, employability, initial teacher training and internationalisation, among others;
  - are key mechanisms for driving cultural change, meeting learners' and employers' needs and enhancing the student experience;

- are key mechanisms for communicating a HEI's strategic direction in these policy areas to stakeholders, including staff and regional partners;
  - will have aligned funding periods, which provides an opportunity for a more holistic approach to developing, managing and monitoring these areas by HEFCW and by institutions, thereby reducing administrative burden.
18. We do not wish to be overly prescriptive about the structure and content of the strategies. We recognise that they must be determined and implemented in a manner that enables institutions to pursue their distinctive missions and respond to their individual circumstances as they deem appropriate.
19. We will wish to be assured, as funders, that institutions' planning and delivery in this strategy period is based on coherent and robust strategies which are being effectively implemented, monitored and reviewed. We will therefore ask the HE Academy to analyse the strategies and advise on whether there are particular actions needed across Wales<sup>7</sup>.
20. In developing your strategies you will want to cross-reference to, and interlink with, related policies and priorities as appropriate. Therefore in the medium term we will align the timetables for submission of related strategies in order better to enable you to make these links as appropriate. These policies and priorities include:
- Initial Teacher Training strategies;
  - Welsh medium provision and Welsh language schemes;
  - internationalisation;
  - retention and student success plans;
  - approach to quality assurance;
  - approach to skills and employability;
  - equality and diversity schemes and policies;
  - student support developments;
  - disability development planning;
  - the Reaching Wider Initiative; and
  - Innovation and engagement strategies.
21. We anticipate that you will set your strategies in the context of the *For our Future* priorities, our Corporate Strategy objectives, regional strategy developments and, for widening access, our *Strategic Approach and Plan* and new Reaching Wider guidance and strategies<sup>8</sup> as noted above.

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<sup>7</sup> In this context see the HE Academy's *A review of Welsh institutional Widening Access Strategies 2006/07 to 2008/09 and the Reaching Wider Funded Proposals 2008/10* available at: [www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/nations/wales/welsh\\_institutional\\_widening\\_access\\_review](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/nations/wales/welsh_institutional_widening_access_review) and its review of Learning and Teaching Strategies, available at [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/nations/wales/welsh\\_IT\\_Strategies\\_english.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/ourwork/nations/wales/welsh_IT_Strategies_english.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> We will be publishing new Reaching Wider three-year strategy guidance in late November.

22. The strategies should also indicate how you will take account of Welsh Assembly policies and strategies, including emerging policies and developments in relation to the transformation agenda, skills, employability, education for sustainability and global citizenship, and the outcomes of the Careers Wales review<sup>9</sup> and the adult community learning strategic statement.
23. Institutions should ensure that strategies comply with legislation relating to equalities, including the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, and that they reflect and consider the objectives and priorities of institutional equality schemes<sup>10</sup>. You should also take account of your own equality action plans.
24. In line with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (formerly Coleg Ffederal) developments and your Welsh Language Scheme, you will also need to take account of Welsh speakers, Welsh learners, and Welsh speaking communities.

## Strategy Development

25. To inform the previous round of Widening Access Strategy and Learning and Teaching submissions, we met with HEIs separately to discuss emerging Assembly policies and priorities and strategic issues at institutional and regional levels. We propose to repeat this series of meetings, following publication of this guidance, and we will contact HEIs to coordinate meetings with senior managers and their colleagues responsible for learning and teaching, widening access, and related areas, as appropriate.
26. The HE Academy will host a seminar on **13 April 2011** on evaluating and developing Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies. This event will be aimed at those directly involved in the development and delivery of new strategies, and it will include discussions relating to the incorporation of recommendations from the Academy's previous review work. The seminar will be informed by an event on **12 April 2011** on enhancing learning and teaching through use of technology. Further details on these events will be circulated in the near future.
27. We will issue supplementary guidance and funding allocations in **April 2011**, subject to confirmation of 2011-12 funding by the Welsh Assembly Government.
28. The supplementary guidance will identify areas where we want you to provide us with information on specific issues and/or priorities. If this

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<sup>9</sup><http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/evaluation/futureambitions/?jsessionid=pyQsMq8VvJp6xgKxqlbbX1bn01fmSSlclNXxS5mQq856w8jllHvP!-238050917?lang=en>.

<sup>10</sup> The Equality Act 2010 is currently the subject of consultation by the Assembly Government <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/equality/equalityact2010>.

information is not already included within the strategy, then you may provide it separately.

29. We will monitor the strategies for 2011/12 to 2013/14 by means of an annual monitoring statement each year which we will ask you to submit each autumn following the end of an academic year.

### **Learning and Teaching Strategies**

30. Circular W04/06HE set out HEFCW's mechanisms for supporting excellent teaching in higher education<sup>11</sup>. Those mechanisms included support for institutional learning and teaching strategies.
31. Circular W10/02HE refreshed the key features of HEFCW support for the enhancement by higher education institutions of learning opportunities for students from 2009/10<sup>12</sup>. It identified that HEFCW would continue to fund institutional learning and teaching strategies, as set out in the previous approach.
32. Previous learning and teaching strategies ran from 2007/08 to 2009/10. They were then extended by a further year to 2010/11 to enable the new strategy guidance to take account of the review of HEFCW's strategy for enhancing learning and teaching through technology<sup>13</sup>. The outcomes of that review will be available in April 2011 and institutions should take account of the key findings in the development of the new strategies.
33. **Annex A** provides our guidance on refreshing learning and teaching strategies.

### **Widening Access (WA) Strategies**

34. Widening Access Strategy funding is one mechanism by which we provide specific funding to the sector to recognise the additional costs incurred in meeting the needs of widening access students as they progress to and through higher education. We anticipate that institutions will use widening access funding to support learners of all ages to prepare for, and succeed in, higher education. This might include providing: subject and skills enhancement; experience of, and information, advice and guidance on, all aspects of higher education, including fees and funding; and supporting the learning and associated needs of widening access students in HE to contribute to their success and retention during their studies and beyond.

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2004/W0406HE.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2004/W0406HE.pdf)

<sup>12</sup>[http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2010/W10%2002HE%20Mechanisms%20for%20Supporting%20the%20Enhancement%20of%20Learning%20Opportunities.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2002HE%20Mechanisms%20for%20Supporting%20the%20Enhancement%20of%20Learning%20Opportunities.pdf)

<sup>13</sup>[http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2008/w08%2012he%20circ.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2008/w08%2012he%20circ.pdf)

35. Previous Widening Access Strategies were funded for the period 2006/07 to 2008/09. We rolled these forward in 2009/10 and 2010/11 and outlined our reasons for doing this in our Widening Access Strategy funding circular 2010/11.<sup>14</sup>
36. Circular W10/37HE sets out our initial proposals for changing the funding system for higher education in Wales<sup>15</sup> and includes our proposals in relation to embedding current additional support for part-time provision into Widening Access and Innovation and Engagement strategies. This would increase funding in both streams with an expectation of specific actions to address the part-time agenda within these strategies from 2011/12. This would be in addition to a proposed part-time premium.
37. **Annex B** provides our guidance on developing new widening access strategies.

### **The Reaching Wider Initiative**

38. The Reaching Wider initiative is another mechanism we use to support the sector to respond to widening access priorities through regional partnerships. Reaching Wider funding provides three Reaching Wider Partnerships led by HEIs with the means to develop innovative, educational aspiration-raising and skills programmes, often working with learners who are not yet at the point of transition into HE<sup>16</sup>.
39. The initiative has been funded since 2002 through a separate allocation from the Welsh Assembly Government to support *Reaching Higher* objectives relating to reconfiguration, collaboration and widening access. Reaching Wider allocations to regional Partnerships have been short term, of one or two years' duration, and based on proposals submitted, which has mitigated against strategic planning and long-term partnership building.
40. In this strategy period we will be inviting three-year Reaching Wider Partnership strategies. This move indicates our long-term commitment to Reaching Wider. It will necessitate greater strategic planning and alignment with: regional strategy developments; local needs and priorities; and individual HEI widening access strategies.
41. While Reaching Wider and Widening Access Strategies clearly require close alignment and articulation between them. We have decided to invite separate RW and WA strategies to ensure clarity between their strategic

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<sup>14</sup> See circular W10/30HE [http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars\\_2010/W10%2030HE%20Widening%20Access%20to%20Higher%20Education%20Allocations%202010\\_11.pdf](http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/circulars/circulars_2010/W10%2030HE%20Widening%20Access%20to%20Higher%20Education%20Allocations%202010_11.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.hefcw.ac.uk/publications/circulars/circulars.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> A review of Reaching Wider structures has resulted in a move from four Reaching Wider Partnerships to three. The merger process involving North and West and Mid Wales Reaching Wider Partnerships began in 2010/11.



objectives and funding streams and to enable the Reaching Wider Partnerships to focus on alignment with regional strategies.

### Equality and diversity

42. As part of our policy development process, we have undertaken an internal equality impact assessment process to consider the impact of this guidance on learners with protected characteristics and groups under-represented in higher education.
43. While no issues of concern were raised, given the significance of the strategies covered by this guidance, the panel recommended that we invite wider involvement in the development of our guidance.
44. Through this circular we therefore invite your views on the equality and diversity implications of this guidance to ensure that there is no negative impact on, nor unintended consequences to, individuals with protected characteristics or groups underrepresented in higher education arising from the implementation of this guidance.
45. We will take account of the outcomes of this consultation in the publication of the supplementary guidance in April 2011.
46. We invite you to submit any matters for consideration by **1 February 2011**.

### Timetable

47. The current timetable for strategy development is provided below:

22 October 2010	Publication of HEFCW's <i>Strategic Approach and Plan to Widening Access to Higher Education</i> for equality impact assessment consultation and engagement
22 November 2010	Equality impact assessment screening of <i>Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies 2011/12 to 2013/14: Initial Guidance</i>
1 December 2010	Publication of the initial guidance for Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies
December 2010	Publication of final version of HEFCW's <i>Strategic Approach and Plan to Widening Access to Higher Education</i>
31 December 2010	End of the funded period for the Gwella project
December 2010/ January 2011	HEFCW/HEI meetings to discuss WA strategic developments in the light of <i>For Our Future</i> and learning and teaching-related matters if desired
January 2011	End of the funded period for the JISC Building Capacity project

1 February 2011	Submission of equality and diversity implications of this guidance
31 March 2011	Evaluation of 'Enhancing learning and teaching through technology: a strategy for higher education in Wales' completed
12 April 2011	Event - Future directions: Feeding forward: enhancing learning and teaching through use of technology
13 April 2011	Event – Future directions: Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategy development, implementation and evaluation
April 2011	Publication of further guidance by HEFCW on Learning and Teaching and Widening Access Strategies, including funding allocations (if available)
29 July 2011	Institutions to submit learning and teaching and widening access strategies for 2011/12 to 2013/14
September 2011	First tranche of funding for 2011/12 released
Autumn 2011	Institutions to submit separate Annual Monitoring Statements for Learning and Teaching and for Widening Access Strategies for 2010/11
January 2012	HEFCW to follow any queries up with institutions, and to confirm that the second tranche of funding will be released in March 2012
January 2012	HE Academy to report on analysis of Learning and Teaching and Widening Access strategies
March 2012	Second tranche of funding for 2011/12 released
April/May 2012	Event: Future directions biennial conference
November 2012	Submission of first Annual Monitoring Statements for Learning and Teaching and for Widening Access Strategies, 2011/12

### Further information

48. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283; email [cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk)) or Jane Johns (tel 029 2068 2219; email [jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk)).